

1. **Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.**

The *Passport to Literature* program was developed by two middle school teachers who are responsible for instructing six sections of gifted language arts students in self-contained classes. The project has the following objectives:

- Increase independent reading among middle-level language arts students.
- Model for teachers a strategy to improve the oral presentation skills of students.
- Develop leadership skills in gifted and talented students.

To accomplish these objectives, sixth and seventh grade teachers and students in the gifted and talented language arts program (Verbal GATE) organize a Book Festival for the entire middle school (1,400 students). At this festival, students present “Book Talks” about their favorite independent reading book from that school year to students in standard and basic skills language arts classes. Visiting students carry with them a *Passport to Literature* in which they record the names and authors of books they wish to read. The festival atmosphere and the creative presentations are designed to foster the idea that reading is enjoyable and that it can open up new horizons to young people

The Book Festival is held each May and is preceded by yearlong activities that prepare the Verbal GATE students to speak confidently in front of their peers. At the beginning of the school year, students are introduced to literature logs in which they and their teachers correspond about literature using a modified Nancy Atwell approach. Each week, teachers in the Verbal GATE program model reading behavior through an “Introduction to the Author” and a “Book Talk.”

Several times throughout the school year, students present creative “Book Talks” to their classmates about a favorite book they have read. They deliver two-minute presentations to persuade other students to read their chosen book. They begin their talk by holding up their book and reciting the title and author. Clever advertising techniques such as repetition, strong emotional appeal, and catchy jingles are used to appeal to the listeners. The ground rules of the Book Talk guide the students into revealing just enough information about the plot to entice the audience to read the selection. The students are encouraged to develop unique and creative strategies when presenting. For example, puppet shows, video productions, *PowerPoint* presentations, talk shows formats, poems, raps, and dance are some of the ways they use to convince their classmates to read their fiction or non-fiction selection. This fast-paced, student-centered activity has proven to have a strong impact on other students. Teachers report that they often select one of the presented books to read during the next marking period.

In early May, Verbal GATE students and teachers select their favorite “Book Talk” to present at the school-wide Book Festival. Each presenter prepares an advertisement about her/his book to distribute to the more than 1,200 students and teachers who visit the festival. In addition, students design banners to decorate the Media Center and book

jackets for their individual station that are set up around the room. Groups of students create murals to advertise the theme of the festival. For example, one mural was entitled, "Soar to Great Heights...With Reading." Simultaneously, letters are sent out to all language arts teachers inviting their classes to the festival. *Passports to Literature* are distributed to teachers for each of their students. These passports allow the visiting students to record ten books, taken from the presentations, that they would like to read during the summer and following school year. All preparations are completed two days prior to the festival.

The day before the festival parents, teachers, and students from the Verbal GATE program come together in the Media Center to create an atmosphere alive with the themes of literature. Students are each assigned a station where they set up their book talks. The station may also include a computer for *PowerPoint* presentations, a TV monitor for videotaped productions, puppet show stages, tape recorders or musical instruments. On the day of the festival, other language arts classes visit at a pre-assigned time to explore the literature presentations. As the students become immersed in the world of books, the excitement of reading is clearly communicated to everyone. Visiting parents, administrations and the press have all commented on the positive message that the festival promotes. The *Passport to Literature* sends the message to each visitor that, in this middle school community, reading is accepted and encouraged.

As a result of the Book Talks and Book Festival, teachers have confirmed a remarkable increase in reading, as well as a significant change in the students' ability to dialogue about books. These activities encouraged students to be more far ranging when self-selecting literature. Their literature logs reflected increased reading in a variety of genres and authors. End of year lists that contained three to five titles have now expanded to 15 and more titles per year. Because of the demand, teachers had to order multiple copies of popular titles or titles by a particular author for classroom libraries. In addition, teachers noticed that students used higher level critical thinking skills when corresponding in their logs

2. **List the specific *Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards** addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses the standard(s). Provide an example to substantiate your response.**

Language Arts standard 3.1 requires that "all students will speak for variety of real purposes and audiences." The *Passport to Literature* addresses this standard when students are required to speak for the purpose of enticing their peers to read.

Standard 3.2 calls for students to "listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources". During book talks, students have to actively listen to information presented to them in a variety of formats including videotapes, *PowerPoint* programs, posters, and oral presentations. Students can explore ideas through the design of creative Book Festival presentations in non-textual, visual formats (standard 3.5).

Language Arts standard 3.4 states that “all students will read a variety of materials and texts with comprehension and critical analysis.” The *Passport to Literature* project encourages students to read a wide variety of written works, both fiction and non-fiction. The language arts teachers review the literature logs kept by the students. They look for critical thinking about plot and style. They evaluate the responses for content, usage, sentence construction and mechanics. It is also an opportunity for students to practice using appropriate details in developing main ideas and to communicate their feelings about the literature. The logs provide the forum for students to write in clear, concise, organized language. The format also demonstrates comprehension and critical analysis skills because students are involved in reading and interpreting the material.

This yearlong program addresses several Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standards. Self-management objectives are the underpinning of the literature logs. Students are required to set short and long term reading goals for themselves. Effective time management is stressed throughout the process. Students have to evaluate their own actions and accomplishments. Rubrics are designed to provide constructive criticism. Dialoguing between teacher and student provides a forum to constructively respond to the comments of others. Most importantly, the leadership role is encouraged when the students have to take on the role of teacher during the Book Talks and Book Festival. It is at these times that the students have to creatively structure their presentations so that their peers can model good reading habits.

Because the use of technology as a tool in the learning process has mushroomed in the last several years, computers and multimedia became a component in the program. Students who will be workers in the next millennium need to know how to use media to convey messages. The use of presentation software (*PowerPoint*) in book talks became a powerful and compelling tool in the hands of the Verbal GATE students.

3. **Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how the practice met these needs.**

Teachers and administrators often assume that students identified as gifted in language arts must, by definition, be avid readers. In examining lists of independent reading in the permanent portfolios of students in the Verbal GATE program, teachers found that this assumption was erroneous. Many students were reading two or three books during the course of the year. Teachers recognized the need for gifted and talented students to develop a love of reading that would develop into a lifelong habit of mind.

In discussing this issue with other language arts teachers in the school, similar patterns were found among their students. The challenge, therefore, was to come up with a way to highlight the enjoyment of reading for the entire school community. The *Passport to Literature* had the possibility of altering the outlook and philosophy of the entire middle school population. The Verbal GATE teachers realized that peers were the most natural medium for turning reluctant readers on to the pleasures of reading.

In order to document an increase in reading in both varieties of genres and books by a diversity of authors, students are required to keep a literature log and list of books read. This list includes the starting date, the name of the book, author of the book and the date the book is completed. The student is also obligated to write an entry for each book read. In order to encourage the reading of sophisticated literature, books are weighed according to level of difficulty. Therefore, more difficult books might require multiple literature log entries. Possible topics for literature logs are: compare and contrast two characters in a book; examine the effects of a character's actions on the plot; evaluate the effectiveness of a character, the plot, or the setting; develop a list of alternative solutions for the problem; evaluate the style of writing; simplify the book for a young child and evaluate its appropriateness; and compare and contrast the book with another book that the student has read.

Throughout the year, students are provided time to dialogue with their peers and their teachers concerning their entries. In addition, at the end of each marking period the students are evaluated for both the reading and written components of their literature logs. A rubric is used for this evaluation.

At the *Passport to Literature* festival, the passport given to all middle school students provided a written record of the success of the program. The passport required students to record the book title, author, and what the book was about for at least ten visited stations. When the visitors returned to their classrooms, they chose and listed four books that they would like to include on their summer reading list. The students in Basic Skills Language Arts created a bulletin board that displayed their passports and the advertisements they had gathered from their visits. This helped to reinforce the idea that reading is "cool." Teachers have commented enthusiastically on the increased reading that their students have engaged in over the course of the year. They have requested that the Book Festival be continued.

4. Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district.

The Verbal GATE teachers who created the program have developed a self-directed packet for the replication of this program in other schools. This project would be relatively simple to replicate in schools where gifted programs in language arts exist. It is also a model that can be used in heterogeneously grouped classes where older students can run the Book Festival and younger students can attend with their passports. Most teachers, particularly those in departmentalized middle school settings, are familiar with literature logs and oral presentations. This project simply expands the importance and enjoyment of reading to the whole school audience.